

## THE MANAGER

By Julie Berry

Lessons learned from undercover videos taken on NY dairy farms by animal rights activists

# Are You Ready for the Cameras?

NY dairy farms have been able to mitigate media coverage related to undercover videos taken by animal rights activists by their sincere and open-door responses.

Animal rights activist groups are increasingly using undercover videos as a tactic to support legislation that regulates dehorning and other common animal care practices. While this legislation to general consumers can appear well-meaning, it is often not based on science, and can threaten to drive food production overseas. The videos are often heavily edited and the undercover activists pose as individuals in need, but are in fact trained to provoke comments from other employees and capture inflammatory videos.

Farmers need to take seriously concerns of consumers about how animals are treated on farms, keep current on research and best management practices, and tell their farm family story effectively.

NY farmers who have dealt with these undercover videos have this advice:

- Identify a spokesperson for the farm before press arrives. Anyone not comfortable with assuming this role should attend media training. The reality is it can happen to any farm for a lot of different reasons, including manure spills, immigration issues, and farm accidents, and you need to be prepared.

- Maintain industry connections and identify who is your contact in a crisis. If your farm became the target of an undercover video who would you reach out to? Be proactive in your community. Participation in programs like the New York State Cattle Health Assurance Program can build good-will in the community and bring positive attention to your farm that you can draw on in a time of crisis. By being an active member of your community you will

find that you may have support in the community that you didn't realize.

- Review your hiring practices. Work with your attorney to implement background checks on new farm hires and are updating your employee handbook. The handbook will be signed by all employees and include a nondisclosure agreement where all information and imagery obtained while working on the farm is property of the farm.

- Open the farm to the community. Evaluate ways to become more involved in the community, including tours, a Web site and an informational brochure. You need to be confident enough in your farm and practices that you can open your farm to the public both before and after a crisis. □



## FYI

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